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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet describes the "San Gregorio" pilot program in Latin America, the first of its type on the continent as a program specifically for adolescent drug addicts. The Christian educative program is designed for males 12-18 years of age, who are addicted to psycho-active substances and evidence serious behavioral problems. It is also aimed at the families of these young people. Two underlying philosophies form the basis of the community: faith in mankind; and faith in God. The San Gregorio community is located in the village of Las Parcelas in the district of Cota, 20 minutes from Bogota, Colombia, and can accommodate 50 young people accompanied by 13 trainers. The booklet describes the program, its sponsors, and mission. (EH)

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COMMUNITY "SAN GREGORIO"

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International Catholic Child Bureau

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COMMUNITY
"SAN GREGORIO"

A christian educative
response to the problem
of drug abuse
in youth aged 12-18 years

Cota - (Cundinamarca)
Colombia

ICCB

International Catholic Child Bureau

The ICCB, which was founded in 1948, is a network for concertation and action. It has members in more than forty countries. It also collaborates with those who work for the dignity and the defence of children's interests. It has consultative status with UNICEF, UNESCO, ECOSOC and the Council of Europe.

The ICCB is also a voice for children. It was the main promoter of the International Year of the Child (1979), and was also involved in the initiation of international level action for street children (1982). It was actively involved in preparing the draft United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Above all, the ICCB wishes to serve all children regardless of their religious creed. It currently has programmes in the following areas : intercultural education of children, street children, children addicted to drugs, refugee children, handicapped children, children subject to sexual exploitation (prostitution, pornography), children and social communication media, Child-to-Child, specialised medico-educational and psycho-social help (training for trainers, children deprived of normal family environment, spiritual growth of handicapped children).

In every action it undertakes, the ICCB is careful to promote the spiritual growth of children, the family, intercultural awareness and the rights of the child.

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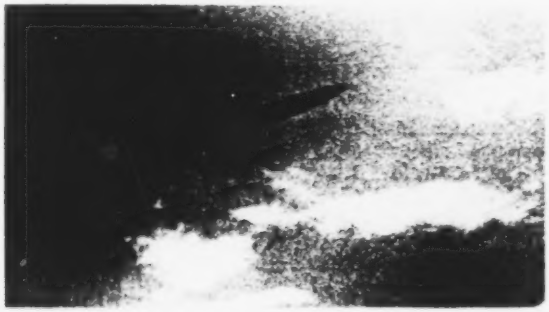
1 - PHILOSOPHY OF THE "SAN GREGORIO" COMMUNITY

1.1 - Faith in Mankind

When they have hope, both children and their families regain confidence in themselves as persons, and in their values and abilities. Man is capable of forging his own destiny. Drugs can obliterate mankind, but people can overcome addiction if they wish and if they have help from their community. In order to give up drugs, young people must be able to discover the value of being a human being, as well as their ideals and the ability they have to achieve these.

1.2 - Faith in God

God, the creator and guardian of a new world, seeks the salvation of everyone : he does not wish anyone to be lost. He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life", and his kingdom is "justice, peace and love". Drugs enslave, faith saves. With drugs, one loses respect and love for other human beings, and for oneself. With faith, one discovers in God the Creator and Father of all, and in others, brothers that deserve to be loved because we are all his children. "Children with nothing are also children of God."



2 - WHAT IS THE "SAN GREGORIO" COMMUNITY ?

2.1 - Purpose

"To provide children who are addicted to drugs and have social behavioural problems with the opportunity of developing physically, mentally, socially and spiritually, as well as voluntarily taking responsibility for their own actions, thoughts and feelings" (Mission of San Gregorio Programme).

2.2 - Aimed at

a) Male minors aged between 12 and 18 years, who are addicted to psycho-active substances, who have serious behavioural problems and little financial resources, with or without family links, and at high physical, moral or social risk.

b) Families of these young people, as the problems of the young people usually originate in their own families, therefore they also require treatment. Working on the same problem together strengthens and unites families, and provides them with fresh stimulation for living.

2.3 - The importance and novel aspect of the programme

The "San Gregorio" programme is a pilot programme in Latin America. This is the first time on our Continent that a programme has been prepared specifically for adolescent drug addicts. Unfortunately, young people in Latin America are starting to take drugs at an increasingly early age. For this reason, the San Gregorio Community has turned into the first scientific experiment to help young drug users. It is supported by the Capuchin Tertiary (100 years of experience in re-educating young people with behavioural problems), and receives advice from the "Fundacion Universitaria Luis Amigo", the Catholic University of Louvain and a Milan Scientific Institute (San Rafaele Hospital).

3 - METHODOLOGY

(This is based on interaction between four areas).

3.1 - Psycho-therapeutic Area

"To help the child to get to know himself and understand the causes, effects and consequences of his problems, providing him with strategies to ensure he can accept his new life condition."

3.2 - Pedagogical Area

a) Formative : "Help the child to initiate a process of knowledge, awareness and development of his value vis-à-vis life at individual, social and transcendent levels".

b) Academic : "Enable the child to obtain scientific and academic skills which help him to adopt a critical attitude to reality and his own knowledge, and mean that he can continue with his education at primary, secondary or vocational levels."

c) Training : "Develop the child's technical abilities and skills so that he can carry out productive activity in society."

3.3 - Socio-family area

"Provide advice and support for the child and his family group, strengthening his domestic community and social processes."

3.4 - Well-being

a) Health : "Providing preventive care to ensure the physical and mental well-being of the child".

b) Recreation and culture : "Providing a recreational atmosphere for the child which enables him to develop his creativity and mechanisms for the use of his free time."

4 - PROCESS

When the child enters the Community, a gradual process is established to enable him to achieve a degree of autonomy and the acquisition of fundamental values. This process has the following stages :

4.1 - Recruitment

The child is made aware of the need to change and undergo a rehabilitation programme. The motivation must come from outside the Community, in some institution or in the street.

4.2 - Adaptation

The child who arrives in the San Gregorio Community is welcomed and then allowed to become familiar with and experienced in the lifestyle, co-existence rules, habits and basic skills of the Community. An attempt is also made to get to know his family and social environment. The child is helped to withdraw physically from drugs. This stage lasts about one month.

4.3 - Level I

Once the child has decided to continue with the Programme, by signing a pedagogical contract, the procedure is to allow him to explore, investigate closely and formulate his problems, and to initiate reconciliation with his family, take on responsibilities at home and commence activities in the technical training and educational area. He shall be allowed visits home preceded by visits from a member of the family. This stage lasts two months.

4.4 - Level II

In this stage, the treatment is intensified. The child is encouraged to initiate and support a process of change and decision-making regarding his life. The child is allowed to carry out activities that enable him to demonstrate to the community and to his social environment the skills and abilities he has learnt in accordance with his personal growth.

This level may last between 6 and 10 months. The child-family relationship is encouraged in an atmosphere of permanent change, and the child is prepared for reintegration into society.

4.5 - Reintegration

This is the bridge between the Community and the outside world. It is the step towards gradual autonomy and ever greater independence from the programme, as well as interdependence from the method. In this stage, the instruments investigated carefully in the Community phase are put to the test.

As the last social reintegration process, this phase attempts to ensure understanding, seeking of and utilisation of new relations with the environment, especially where there had been partial or total failure in the past.

Three periods are spent in a residential building in the city : a) resident b) the child goes out daily and returns to the Centre c) he reintegrates into the socio-family environment, attending the Centre and support groups three times a week.

5 - FAMILIES

Families are linked to the San Gregorio Programme by means of a rehabilitation process in tandem with that of the child, strengthening their relations in such a way that they constitute a positive element in the overall process.

Therapeutic and training activities are developed with the families, such as : family meetings, seminars, workshops, days of co-existence in the Community, interviews with the trainers, the psychologist and the social worker, etc.

It is genuinely necessary, and a source of great wealth, for the family to be able to discover and deal with their problem in conjunction with the Community's trainers and with their own child. Learning to talk things out and to look at conflicting situations from a different point of view is of extraordinary benefit to physical and mental health. It is very stimulating for the child to feel his parents and relations close to him and to see them growing together with him in mutual understanding and support.

It is also necessary to learn to assimilate the inevitable failures which occurred in the past, and not simply pardon them, creating resentment. Nobody is perfect, but we can all improve.

6 - ACTIVITIES IN THE SAN GREGORIO COMMUNITY

6.1 - Knowledge of oneself

- Groups for personal, family and social discovery;
- Encounter groups, for expression of feelings;
- Support groups;
- Relaxation and development workshops. Social skills;
- Seminars on sexuality, drug addiction, communication and family relations;
- Family encounter groups. Group and individual participation;
- Application of tests and projects;
- Apprenticeship and training in decision-making, assertiveness, stress, feelings and emotions, identity and affection processes;
- Treatment and intervention during crises;
- Values, etc.

6.2 - Education and Training

- School analysis;
- Identification of apprenticeship problems;
- Academic grading;
- Individualised teaching with simul-taneous promotion and official validation by the ICFES;
- Assessment of interests, aptitude and psychomotor skills;
- Placement and apprenticeship in workshops : woodwork, metalwork, creative development, baking, cattle-raising.

6.3 - Physical and mental health

- Medical examination;
- Dental and medical treatment;
- Balanced nutritional diet;
- Cleaning up of environment;
- Sports and guided recreation, inside and out;
- Cultural activities inside and out;
- Celebration of the "Festival of Life" week;
- Competitions, integration parties, co-existence;
- Adequate use of free time;
- Walks, encounters with other similar groups;
- Singing, drawing, theatre;
- Etc.

7 - INFLUENCE OF THE "SAN GREGORIO" COMMUNITY

7.1 - The Family

Through our work with the families of the children in the Community, we try to restructure the family nucleus and scales of value, and also to make people aware of their roles in the community.

7.2 - The Street

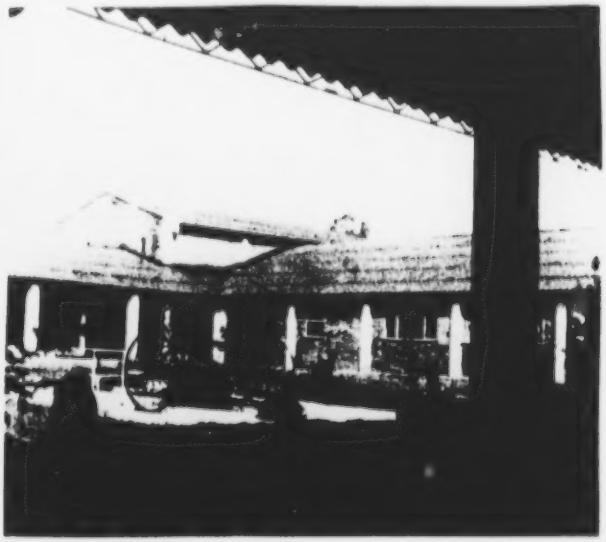
We exercise influence at a preventive level, making available human resources, mainly with the children and their families as multiplying agents of social reintegration. We believe in their abilities and values, as witnesses of a life in the process of rehabilitation.

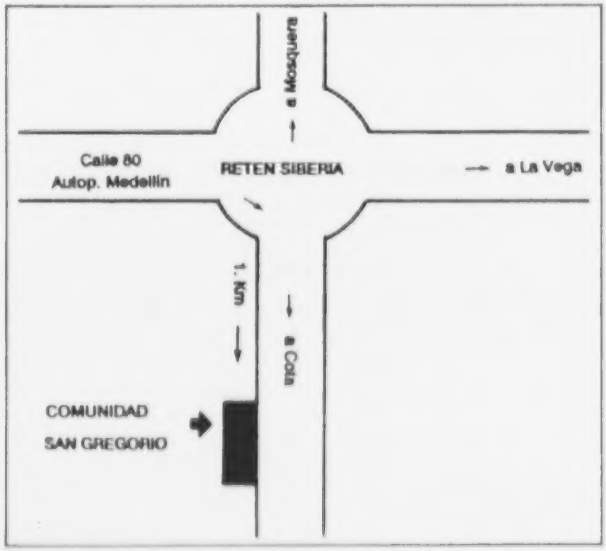
7.3 -The School

Our educational experience is an example for other institutions working in this area, such as : juvenile prisons, prisons, secondary schools, youth groups and organisations, etc. We provide advice and follow-up to these to help them apply new preventive methods.

8 - LOCATION

The Community is located on the San Gregorio farm (hence its name) in the village of "Las Parcelas" in the district of Cota (Cundinamarca), 20 minutes from Bogota. It consists of about 54 acres of cultivable land, donated by the Melo Torres Brothers to the Capuchin Tertiary Congregation so that young people in difficulty could be looked after. It can house 50 young people accompanied by 13 trainers.





9 - WHO SUPPORTS THE "SAN GREGORIO" COMMUNITY

9.1 - The Capuchin Tertiary

Founded by Monsignor Luis Amigo y Ferrer on 12th April 1889. Its mission is to "help young people who have strayed from the path of truth and virtue".

9.2 - The ICCB and the EEC

The ICCB (International Catholic Child Bureau), non-governmental organisation with headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland) and the EEC (European Economic Community), headquarters in Brussels (Belgium), have promoted this programme by providing training for the trainers (6 months in 1988), and have also promoted the implementation and development of the programme since it started (10th August 1988), and evaluated the outcome.

9.3 - The "Fundacion Universitaria Luis Amigo" (university foundation)

The Foundation manages the San Gregorio Community and assesses it scientifically in collaboration with the Catholic University of Louvain and a Milan Scientific Institute.

9.4 - The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF)

The Institute supports the Community by dealing with boys with behavioural and drug addiction problems. At the ICBF, it is responsible for awarding operating licences (Licencia de Funcionamiento).

9.5 - Voluntary workers

These are people who collaborate by giving their time to various community activities or providing professional services for young people.

10 - THREE MINUTES OF REFLECTION

10.1 - Your child could become a drug addict

It is a terrible thought - but it could happen! It is no longer enough to have a well-organised home and give your children a good example.

Drugs are everywhere, and drug traffickers are stalking the streets. They know that their wretched profits are based on the misery of many people. They do not care about the lives and future of young people, or the happiness of families. They are only concerned about their fatal earnings, whose results can only be prison or death.

Your child is at risk! You know that only too well. But the only way to counteract this is, fortunately, within your home :

Understanding - sincere dialogue - friendship - attention - affection - faith. Although drugs constitute such a dreadful evil, they give rise to an exceptional good : family unity and the awareness that it is better to <u>be</u> than to <u>have</u>.

10.2 - "Every child is your child"

Just as your own child cannot live in isolation, it is easy to understand that the good you desire for your child should be obtained for <u>all</u> the children in the world. In a way, <u>all</u> children are <u>our children</u>. And in a way, they are also our responsibility.

Leaving a child to suffer is like allowing your own child to suffer. Allowing a young person to run the risk of drug addiction is like pushing your child towards it.

Fighting for the health of your child means demanding health for all of humanity.

Giving a helping hand to a young drug addict is like picking a child of yours off the ground. All children are your children!

10.3 - Are drugs the worst evil ?

Certainly not, although the damage they do is terrible and in many cases irreparable. But the reasons for taking drugs are particularly odious :

- The injustice which condemns a family to misery;
- The selfishness and pride which prevent dialogue within the family;
- The irresponsibility which produces babies but does not bring up children;
- The consumer society which imposes the tyranny of having and enjoying, ignoring being and the person.

10.4 - Drug addiction : an evil caused by many factors

- Not enough affection, understanding, family... too much ill treatment, bad example, alcohol;
- Not enough dialogue, presence at home, love between parents... too many shady deals, too much infidelity, swearing;
- Too many "buddies"... not enough friendship;
- Too much indulgence... not enough affection;
- Too much work... not enough education;
- Too much scolding... not enough good example;
- Too many words... not enough listening;
- Too much authoritarianism... not enough authority;
- Too much anxiety... not enough FAITH.

11 - MESSAGES

11.1 - To the street boys

What are you doing with your life? Don't you know that you are worth a lot and that there are people who need you! "Fight with spirit, for loving is power" (Jose Francisco, 17 years old, resident of San Gregorio Community).

"You are not alone, and you are worth a lot. You are a person with problems but this does not mean you are useless. Fight to be free. Fight for yourself, for your family... you still have time to change and improve. Cheer up, and fight for yourself. I will be waiting here for you with open arms, loving and demanding" (Carlos Javier, 18 years old, resident of San Gregorio Community).

"I offer you my experience : how I was before and how I am now. You have the future of the world within you. Do not endanger this future. Live healthily now. From this moment on, forget about your past and get on with your future. I can offer you love, understanding, help. Have faith in the Lord. Fight for your life!" (Jesus David, 15 years old, resident of the San Gregorio Community).

11.2 - To families in difficulty

"Do not deny your child... or anyone who asks for your help. HELP them. This may be your only opportunity to do good, to make another person happy" (Mother of a resident of the San Gregorio Community).

"Speak to your children more, devote time to listening to them, helping them, giving them support and trust, so that they can make progress in the Programme" (Mother of a resident of the San Gregorio Community).

"I have learnt not to reject the young drug addict, but to understand and trust him" (Father of a young person in San Gregorio).

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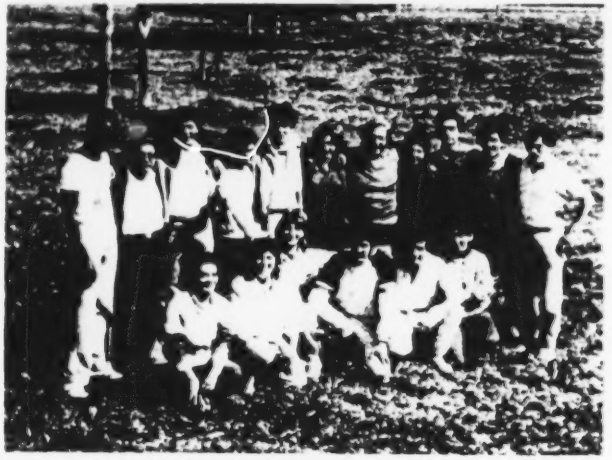
12 - THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SAN GREGORIO COMMUNITY

Vienna, June 1987 : From left to right : Dr Alvaro Ribera (Bolivia); Dr François Ruegg, Secretary General of the ICCB; Dr Dennis Callagy, Permanent Representative of the ICCB in Vienna; Fr. Jose Antonio Lopez Lamus, Provincial of the Capuchin Tertiary (Colombia); and Dr Jean-Paul Roussaux (Belgium).



Representatives from : Capuchin Tertiary Community, Fundacion Universitaria Luis Amigo, and Trainers.

13 - FURTHER INFORMATION

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  Telephone : (91) 2713275

- Fundacion Universitaria Luis Amigo
  BOGOTA : Avda. Suba No 128-B-71
  Telephone : (91) 2260969
  or
  MEDELLIN : Transv. 51A - No 67B-134
  Telephone : (94) 2301311

- International Catholic Child Bureau
  GENEVA (Switzerland) : 65 rue de Lausanne - CH 1202
  Telephone : (22) 7313248
  or
  MONTEVIDEO (Uruguay) : Av. 8 de Octubre 2738
  Telephone : 802717

- San Gregorio Community
  Box 86-887; BOGOTA (Colombia)

THE CAPUCHIN TERTIARY

We are a religious community founded by Monsignor Luis Amigo y Ferrer on 12th April 1889 in Massamagrell (Spain), and approved by the Holy See in 1902.

Our mission is to help young people in difficulty who have "strayed from the path of truth and virtue."

We have Communities in 16 countries. We collaborate with Reeducation Centres, Prevention Centres and Communities specially devoted to supporting young people with drug problems.

Our "pedagogic system" is based on the Teaching of Love : it takes account of the needs of the young person, and is both gradual and personal, demanding and understanding.

Our mottos :

"Every young person who reeducates himself is a generation which saves itself".

"A child in difficulty is a cry for love".